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UNCLAS DUSHANBE 002014

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, DRL

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SUBJECT: ENGAGING HUMAN RIGHTS DAY DISCUSSION AT TAJIK TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

REF: A. A) DUSHANBE 002004

[1](#)B. B) DUSHANBE 002005

[1](#)1. The Russian Embassy and Tajik Embassy didn't want it to happen. But CdA and Emboffs held a broad-ranging and energetic discussion with students and faculty members of the Tajik Technological University for Human Rights Day 2005 (NOTE: Not Tajik Technical University as stated in reftels A and B. END NOTE.) CdA delivered opening remarks, fielded several poignant questions, and before turning over the remainder of the nearly two-hour roundtable discussion to PolOff, PAS, and USAID.

[1](#)2. The Tajik Technological Students led off the discussion with direct questions about secret CIA prisons in Europe, America's hope to improve democracy/human rights in Tajikistan, and a soulful criticism on how real Tajiks can care about democracy if more pressing and primal concerns, like hunger and heat, make democracy seem like a luxury that only other countries can afford. CdA emphasized that democratically elected governments are more responsive and accountable, especially on issues that hit home like jobs and poverty reduction and said Tajikistan can have prosperity and democracy. On secret prisons, CdA said the United States is wrestling with the issue, in the framework of established human rights accords and with the full and necessary participation of an open press.

[1](#)3. Later in the discussion, Rector Amir Kataev and Deputy Rector Bozorali Azizov tried to steer the conversation away from human rights to focus on the politically safe theme of how they can increase material funding and cooperation between the university and the Embassy. The students, undeterred by official posturing by their university leaders, returned to the topic of human rights and democracy with most of their questions.

[1](#)4. COMMENT: The Tajik Government still considers the very words "human rights" taboo. The reality, however, is that students and Tajiks are often very willing to tackle the subject with Emboffs given the right setting. The Tajik Technological students asked heartfelt, engaging, and at times accusatory and challenging questions. But the informal setting and give and take resonated with the students who clearly enjoyed a chance to parry and match wits with Embassy staff. Post will continue to use any and all opportunity to have such discussions with Tajik students of all ages. END COMMENT.

ARMBRUSTER

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